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**PEDIATRICS GROUP HONORS VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH VETERAN
WITH CHILD ADVOCATE AWARD**

(RICHMOND, Va.)--A career that began behind bars now touches the lives of each of the approximately 100,000 children born in Virginia each year. In 1968, Pat Dewey was providing one-on-one speech and language therapy to juvenile offenders. Today she manages the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program, which ensures the early identification and treatment of hearing loss for all children born in Virginia hospitals.

On Nov. 5, the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics honored Dewey with its 2005 Child Advocate Award for her work in the early detection of hearing loss among newborns. The award was initiated in 1982 to recognize people who, in the course of more than a year, had significantly contributed to the advancement of child health and welfare in the Commonwealth. Previous recipients of the award include Gov. Mark R. Warner.

Dewey was raised in a family of nurses in Dinwiddie County and was expected to go to college. "But I didn't want any part of pain and needles," said the 33-year VDH veteran. She settled on a career path when she learned about speech-language pathology, which "sounded a lot like nursing in that you were helping people."

Dewey has spent most of her career helping to identify and treat hearing loss in children, one of the most common birth defects in the United States. When a new law requiring all hospitals to test the hearing of newborns before discharge took effect in 2000, Dewey worked with hospitals to increase the number of children screened. As a result, 98.1 percent of infants born today in Virginia hospitals are screened before they leave the hospital. Those who do not pass the test are referred to an audiologist for follow-up testing. Dewey's program receives the results of these tests and works with parents and health professionals to ensure that children with hearing loss receive follow-up and intervention services as early as possible.

Dewey also initiated development of a Web-based reporting system that allows hospitals to quickly report test results. Over the years Dewey has secured federal grants to expand resources available for the early detection of hearing loss in children.

Last May, Dewey started a hearing aid loan bank to provide infants and children with hearing aids temporarily while their parents work to secure permanent hearing aids. Children with hearing loss often have difficulty in communication and emotional development when identification and intervention for the problem are delayed.

Dewey's outlook on career and life are summed up in a sign hanging on her office wall. It says, "A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove--but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child."

Hearing loss affects between one and three of every 1,000 newborns. VDH estimates as many as 300 Virginia children are born every year with hearing loss. To learn more about VDH's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention program, visit www.vahealth.org/hearing.

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